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# United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON  
AGRICULTURE, NUTRITION AND FORESTRY

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6000

202-224-2035

December 9, 2014

THAD COCHRAN, MISSISSIPPI  
RANKING REPUBLICAN MEMBER

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JOHN THUNE, SOUTH DAKOTA

The Honorable Tom Wheeler  
Chairman  
Federal Communications Commission  
445 12<sup>th</sup> Street, SW  
Washington, DC 20554

1261

Dear Chairman Wheeler:

Passage of the 1996 Telecommunications Act established the important federal policy principle that rural areas of our country must have reasonably equivalent access to the same telecommunications services as more urban areas of America. The proliferation of wireless telecommunications technology and services across our country in recent years has been a critical factor in the implementation of this key policy principle. The availability of reliable mobile telecommunications networks in rural America has been and should remain a driving force for agricultural productivity and economic development in these areas, and for meeting the health and public safety needs of rural residents.

As the Chairwoman and Ranking Member of the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry, we urge the Federal Communications Commission to be mindful of the needs of those in the agriculture sector and of other Americans living in rural areas as you consider final rules for Phase II of the Mobility Fund (MF II). We are hopeful that this proceeding to reform and revise the Universal Service Fund's support of wireless networks will ensure that rural Americans have the same access to competitive advanced wireless services as their urban counterparts.

Significant gains in agricultural productivity and yields have been made possible through the use of wireless technologies which depend upon the availability of robust wireless coverage over our nation's rural communities and vast croplands. Furthermore, the expansion and use of telehealth and public safety applications that keep America's farming communities healthy and safe also depend on reliable access to wireless networks. The existence of such wireless networks and the coverage they provide in rural areas requires continued, competitively neutral Universal Service support for their construction, upgrading and ongoing operation.

The current and future success of the rural economy is closely tied to access to ubiquitous, advanced mobile infrastructure that can provide high speed data and voice coverage. Since considerable coverage gaps persist in many rural areas, the rules for MF II and the resources made available for this program must meet this challenge.

We ask the Commission to reconcile its rules for MF II with the challenges of realizing quality wireless coverage in rural America, and we hope the FCC will craft a Universal Service support mechanism that will meet rural America's growing need for access to competitive advanced wireless services.

Sincerely,



Debbie Stabenow  
Chairwoman



Thad Cochran  
Ranking Member



FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION  
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF  
THE CHAIRMAN

January 29, 2015

The Honorable Thad Cochran  
United States Senate  
113 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Cochran:

Thank you for your letter expressing interest in how best to update our Universal Service Fund (USF) policies to reflect current consumer mobility demand and need, especially in rural and high-cost areas. Your views are very important and will be included in the record of the proceeding and considered as part of the Commission's review.

The universal service program is one of the most important tools at our disposal to ensure that consumers and businesses in rural America have similar opportunities as their urban and suburban counterparts to be active participants in the United States of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The Commission in the 2011 *USF/ICC Transformation Order* took significant strides to update the universal service program to reflect the realities of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In particular, the Commission adopted specific performance goals to preserve and advance the universal availability of voice service and to ensure the universal availability of modern networks capable of providing advanced mobile voice and broadband services.

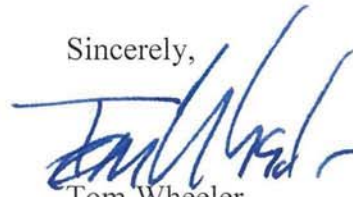
A core component of the Commission's 2011 USF reforms was the creation of the Connect America Fund to preserve and advance voice and robust broadband services, both fixed and mobile, in high-cost areas of the nation that the marketplace would otherwise not serve. The Commission's Wireless Telecommunications Bureau completed the auction for Mobility Fund Phase I on September 27, 2012. The auction had 33 winning bidders eligible to receive a total of up to \$299,998,632 in one-time support to provide 3G or better mobile voice and broadband services. Disbursements began in April 2013 and are anticipated to continue through 2016 as carriers complete their deployments.

Last year, the Commission adopted a *Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (FNPRM)* to seek comments on proposals to target funds to support mobile services in a Mobility Fund Phase II. In the *FNPRM*, we reaffirmed our commitment to preserving and advancing mobile voice and broadband services in high-cost areas. In light of marketplace developments in the years since we originally adopted the Mobility Fund regime, we sought comment on how to target funding to areas in which service only exists today due to support from the universal service fund. We also seek to extend service to areas that would not otherwise be covered by commercial 4G Long Term Evolution (LTE) deployments. Our goal is consistent with yours:

how best to use the limited funds available to us to ensure that rural Americans can take advantage of the opportunities presented by a “mobile society.”

I welcome a dialogue with stakeholders on how best to accomplish our shared objectives, and I look forward to working with you as we continue reforming and modernizing the USF high-cost program to ensure that all Americans have access to robust voice and broadband services. I appreciate your interest in this matter. Please let me know if I can be of any further assistance.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Tom Wheeler", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Tom Wheeler





OFFICE OF  
THE CHAIRMAN

FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION  
WASHINGTON

January 29, 2015

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United States Senate  
133 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

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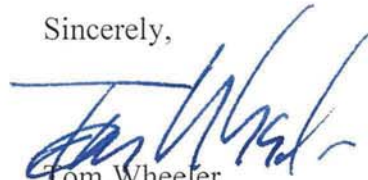
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Tom Wheeler